

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5234

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As of February 1, 2017

**Title:** An act relating to a systemwide credit policy regarding AP exams.

**Brief Description:** Requiring establishment of a systemwide credit policy regarding AP exams.

**Sponsors:** Senators Mullet, Palumbo, Rivers, Lias, Wilson and Kuderer.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education: 1/31/17.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Directs Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to establish an evidence-based systemwide policy for granting undergraduate course credits to students who have earned a minimum score of three on Advanced Placement (AP) exams.
- Requires institutions of higher learning to post their credit policies on campus websites for the 2017 fall academic term.
- Directs WSAC to conduct biannual reviews of the systemwide AP credit policy and report noncompliance by November each year beginning in 2019.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**Staff:** Clint McCarthy (786-7319)

**Background:** AP exams allow high school students to earn college credits and skip introductory college classes if the student achieves a minimum score required by an institution of higher learning. Students in grades 9, 10, 11 or 12 may enroll in high school courses taught by high school teachers, using college level curricula, which is approved by the College Board through a syllabi review process. Students pay a \$91 fee to take an optional, final, standardized exam. The fee may be higher if the high school adds administrative costs to the fee. Some districts absorb the cost of the exam fee. Fee waivers, subsidized through a combination of state and federal funds, have historically been available for low-income students—reduced rate is \$15; federal funds may no longer be available as a

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result of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the restructuring of federal grants. Once a student is enrolled, the AP course is indicated on the high school transcript. It does not appear on the college transcript until and unless the college awards credit, based on the exam score. In Washington, 346 schools in 186 districts are offering AP programs.

Each college and university makes its own decisions about awarding credit and placement. Most institutions have a written policy that informs prospective students of what the minimum score for which a credit is earned and how many credits are earned. To receive credit, a student must request that the College Board send an official AP score report to the college either at the time of testing or afterward through a score report request. At institutions of higher learning in the state of Washington, the minimum score needed to earn credit can vary by program within an institution. For instance, the minimum score required in Biology is a four in order to get ten credits at the University of Washington. However, the minimum score in Art History is four in order to get five credits at the same institution.

**Summary of Bill:** WSAC is directed to establish an evidence-based systemwide policy for granting undergraduate course credits to students who have earned a minimum score of three on AP exams. Institutions of higher learning must post their credit policies on campus websites for the 2017 fall academic term. WSAC must conduct biannual reviews of the systemwide AP credit policy and report noncompliance by November each year beginning in 2019.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Every school picks a different score for every course. Community colleges and four-year institutions do not have consistent policies for earning credit for AP classes. There needs to be a simple system that will result in more students taking AP courses. There needs to be a uniform and consistent policy for dual credit. This bill is a step towards consistency and transparency. The College Board has determined that a score of 3, 4, or 5 demonstrate proficiency. Twenty other states have adopted uniform credit policies. Students with qualifying AP scores are generally more qualified than students who take the introductory courses at a university. A universal policy allows students to know from the beginning what they can expect for planning courses and future expenses. Scores are not consistent for transfer students. If you received a score of 3 that counted for credit at a community college, it may not count at a four year institution. Students that scored a 3 consistently outperform a student that took the introductory course.

OTHER: Our policy in the state is institution led, rather than state led. Washington's public four-year institutions recognize a score of 3 on AP exams. Each year the four year institutions provide WSAC with updates of college credit equivalencies for AP exams to populate the dual credit look-up tool and also post this information on institutional websites. The sector's policy is in alignment with state policies recognized by The College Board.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Mark Mullet, Prime Sponsor; Sara Stewart, The Collage Board; Terry Whitney, Director State Government Relations, The College Board; Elissa Goss, Washington Student Association; Vicki Christophersen, College Board; Pam Kerouac, College Board.

OTHER: Julie Garver, Council of Presidents.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.